



## Seizing the Day:

### *Newsies* at Floyd Central High School

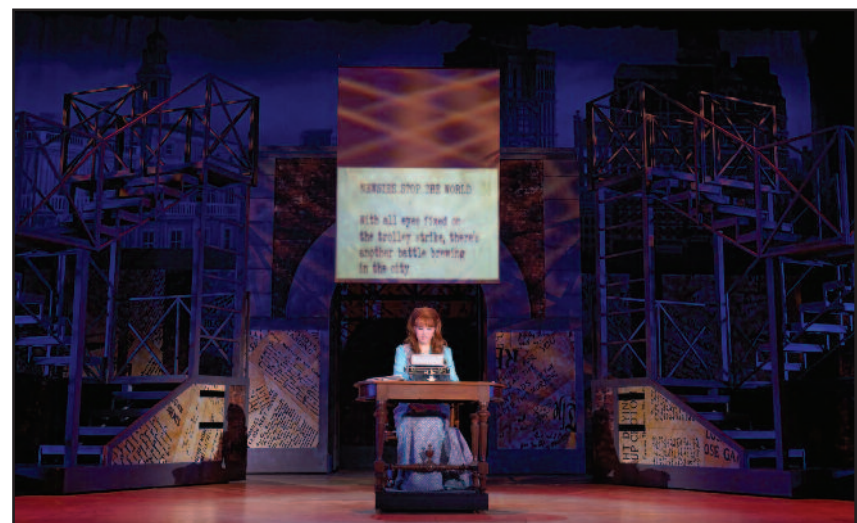
The Disney Theatricals-produced musical *Newsies* was originally intended as a property to the stock and school markets, until an inaugural production at Paper Mill Playhouse in Milburn, New Jersey was so well-received that it transferred to Broadway for a run of 1,004 performances. Last fall, *Newsies* was produced by Floyd Central High School in Floyds Knobs, Indiana, in a remarkably good-looking production that featured lighting by Michael Nevitt, of Crossfade Design, that is a harbinger of things to come for the popular musical.

Nevitt's son, Connor, attends Floyd Central High, which has an unusually elaborate theatre arts program. (To underline the point, the program has its own website, separate from the school.) Dedicated to providing students with hands-on experience both on- and backstage, the program, under the direction of Robbie Steiner, produces five to seven shows a year. Past productions include *42nd Street*, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, *Titanic*, *Seussical*, *Children of Eden*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Mary Poppins*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The school also represented Indiana at the International Fringe Festival and

has been named "best theatre school in the Midwest" by *Stage Directions Magazine*.

In 2017, Disney approached Steiner about doing a pilot production of *Newsies* before releasing the rights to the school market. (Among the issues to be explored was how many female performers could be worked into the show, as it is the rare musical with a majority male cast.) Connor, who has designed lighting for recent Floyd High productions, was cast in the major supporting role of Crutchie, so, Nevitt says, "I volunteered to take over for him."

Photos: Sam Vogt







The school has in its inventory numerous items from Elation Professional and an ETC Ion console. Approaching Elation to expand the lighting rig, Nevitt asked for EMOTION digital projector moving head lighting fixtures, which he used to project sketches drawn by Jack Kelly, the musical's hero, and news stories typed up by Katherine, the girl reporter with whom Jack falls in love. "I also used the Emotions to create texture on the set and for other effects, including scrolling headlines," he says. He obtained eight Elation Artiste DaVincis, chosen for their wide 6° to 48° zoom, which he used to light the multiple towers that moved around the stage. Making use of the school's lineup of Elation gear, he employed Platinum Beam 5Rs for specials and gobo textures, Color Chorus light bars for washing the backdrop depicting the skyline of New York, and Arena Q Zooms for backlight and downlight.

Planning ahead, Nevitt says he based his design around the rep plot at the Lied Center for the Performing Arts in Lincoln, Nebraska, where *Newsies* will perform, as part of the International Thespian Festival in June. (Before that, there will be two warm-up performances at the 2,500-seat Whitney Hall at the Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts in Louisville.) This was a prudent move, given the short time allowed for load-ins. (There are specials in the Lied Center's

rep plot, but there is no time for refocusing, he says.)

Overall, Nevitt says, "I tried to add a lot of color to the show," an approach that is borne out in the photos accompanying this story. He relied on side and overhead positions, with relatively little frontlight and two Lycian followspots in side balcony positions, to pick out individual performers. A rare exception to the no-frontlight rule came in the ballad "Santa Fe," in which Jack describes his dream of escaping New York; Nevitt treated the backdrop with subtle desert colors. The designer also used plenty of haze, using Elation's HZ-500s to create beam effects in the air.

Other lighting effects included beam chases in "King of New York," in which Jack and his friends celebrate his newfound celebrity, and a big bump at the end of "Once and For All," when the newsies print their own paper, giving their side of the labor dispute at the musical's heart. The designer provided similar support to the rousing Act One finale, "Seize the Day," in which the newsies stage a strike to obtain better working conditions. The detailed and evocative unit set—which includes an insert for "Watch What Happens," featuring Katherine, and a small-scale proscenium for "That's Rich," featuring the vaudeville star Medda Larkin—was designed by Steiner. The International Thespian Festival, the production's next stop, is June 25 – 30. 🎭

